

OVEREMOTIONAL

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Steven

The first time I kissed another boy was probably the worst day of my life. One moment I'm waiting for the upstairs loo at a yay-we-did-our-first-week-of-mock-exams party, the next, I'm being led into a bedroom, and I'm making out with a total stranger.

And then his head exploded.

Like, actually exploded. I was dressed like a zombie at the time, which basically meant I'd ripped some old clothes and let Freya squirt me with fake blood. Unoriginal, but at least it disguised the *real* blood.

Oh god. The real blood.

Just what the hell was I supposed to do? I couldn't exactly explain to the police that I'd snogged someone's head out of existence. I had been careless. My powers had been getting stronger, but I thought one party would be fine. That I could keep my emotions in check. And now they've . . . killed someone. *I've* killed someone. So, I did what any seventeen-year-old walking atom bomb would do.

I ran.

Ran home, packed a bag and kept on running. Okay, there were some buses in there too, but I think it's safe to say no





one will find me here. Grunsby-on-Sea: the official arse end of nowhere.

I need to stop thinking about it. I can't let myself get overemotional. Whenever I do, things . . . happen. It's weird. Whatever I feel seems to manifest in some strange and horrific way. I can't be happy without inflicting misery. It's like the universe is conspiring against me – constantly playing cruel tricks. I try not to indulge it. I try not to feel anything.

That's why I'm alone.

No one around to hurt. It's safer for everyone else if I just stay here by myself and keep my emotions (and these damn manifestations) under control.

It's 11 a.m., but I just woke up. I say “woke,” but I don't think I actually slept. My body was exhausted from lugging boxes around, but my mind just doesn't want to stop. Every night, I replay that party – that popping noise – over and over. Can't remember the last time I got eight hours.

I throw on some clothes and head into the kitchen: bread in the toaster, kettle on. It's a revolting kitchen, but not because it's dirty; it isn't. The moment I feel even a whiff of disgust, I draw all the dirt and dust in the flat toward me like a human vacuum. I guess I attract what disgusts me. Handy, but showering it all off is a pain. No, the kitchen is revolting because it hasn't been redecorated since 1954. Busy floral wallpaper is peeling from the walls, and the pink paint that once coated the cupboards is chipped and flaky. I wouldn't be surprised if the whole flat were made of asbestos.

I've been considering calling myself an emomancer. Makes sense. Pyromancers control fire and necromancers bring back the dead – at least in Dungeons and Dragons or whatever. So,





emomancers have emotion powers. I mean, it sounds like I should dye my hair black and wear a trench coat, but what else can I call it? I don't think there are emos anymore anyway – a casualty of the noughties. I was too young to be one, but I do remember Freya's older brother straightening his hair within an inch of its life at the time.

The kettle boils, and I scoop some instant coffee (the supermarket own-brand kind that tastes like someone blended up topsoil) into a mug. I don't trust myself to have anything nicer. Two weeks ago, I tried a pumpkin spice latte and shattered every window in the high street. It was delicious, though. The memory of the spicy-sweet drink rushes to my lips, and my toast catches fire, yellow light fizzing around my hand.

Great.

At least burned toast might mean sunshine today. But sunshine might make me happy and cause a sinkhole in Grunby town centre . . .

I stop myself thinking. It's something I learned from one of those meditation apps. Not sure super-powered teenagers were their target demographic, but it works. I just picture white and nothing else, and usually everything balances out. No thoughts, no emotions, no *tricks*. I call them that because they are rarely treats.

I try to scrape the burned bits from the toast, but it's completely charred. My tricks seem to be getting stronger and more frequent lately. Used to be, I'd only cause a trick if there was a particularly strong emotion, and even then, there were long periods between them. Now I run out of fingers counting all the ones before lunch.

I thought a job might take my mind off things and keep my tricks under control. Plus I could use the cash. When I came to





Grunsbys-on-Sea, a week or so ago, I tried to be a bartender in a run-down pub called the Lazy Cough. I was keeping everything together until some middle-aged hag demanded I make her a Porn Star Martini. What even is that? She kept shouting that Millennials were “entitled slackers” despite the fact I was born after the millennium, so I haven’t touched a pair of skinny jeans in my life. She just kept going on. I could feel the tricks bubbling up inside me, feeding off my anger until I just couldn’t take it and told her to shut up.

That was when I realised my anger manifests as fear in other people. Everyone fled the pub in terror like I’d brought an emotional support lion with me. I was banned from the premises and told I was lucky they didn’t call the police.

Since then, I’ve been unloading cargo at the wharf when the ships come in. It’s hard, manual work, but at least I don’t have to think. Or worry about feeling. There are surprisingly few emotional reactions one can have to stacking crates and lugging boxes.

Thus far, no tricks.

As I pull on my boots, my triceps burn, and back muscles I didn’t know I had grind like rusted gears. If the tricks don’t kill me, then my sheer unfitness in the face of manual labour will. Why couldn’t I have gone to the gym more often? The one at school was free for all sixth formers, but I felt too embarrassed to go. What if everyone laughed at me for standing on the elliptical the wrong way round? Someone might film me, and I could end up on TikTok. Freya loves watching videos of people hurting themselves. How I would love to laugh at someone else’s misfortune for a change. But any rogue laughs could cause a thunderstorm or an old woman to slip and break her hip.





I don't know if there are any others like me. And if there are, would they make good things happen when they are happy, or would they be broken like me? I wonder if they can . . . relieve their "teenage urges" without causing a hurricane.

I did that.

I finished, then looked out the window to see next door's shed flying around like it was about to drop on the Wicked Witch of the West. At first, I didn't connect the dots. My powers were still developing, and my hands weren't glowing different colours yet. It wasn't until puberty really had its claws around my hormones that I began to see the trail of devastation. Earthquakes, lightning strikes – I'm pretty sure I even caused a foot-and-mouth outbreak across the county when I bunked off school.


I was probably the most sexually frustrated teenager to ever walk the planet. I learned to stop thinking about it. And it works. It *was* working until a guy I had just met kissed me, and I made his head pop like an angry spot.

But it's not just sex stuff. Other tricks happen depending on how I feel. Things often go in pairs and opposites, and the stronger the emotion, the stronger the trick. I keep a little chart in my pocket to keep track: my cheat sheet. I've left some empty boxes because I seem to develop a new trick every couple of months. Just the other day, I pushed a convertible into a wall by admiring it.

I used to live my life and ignore whatever occasionally manifested. Now I don't have that luxury. All I can do is try not to feel – go about my day with mechanical efficiency, like a passenger in my own body. But it's so hard. Every time I slip up, something terrible happens.



At this point, all I want is to feel nothing.





Jacketed and booted, I step out of my gross time capsule of a rental flat, and the November sea breeze bashes my face. There's something particularly cruel about the seaside in winter. The wind is extra cold, and it carries salt that licks your face like a cat's tongue.

Grunsbby-on-Sea is a dump. That's partly why I chose to come here: some vague sense of altruism. If I torture myself, then maybe nothing bad would happen to anyone else. This place topped every BuzzFeed listicle for worst places to live and was even voted "Most depressing town in the UK". Not that the Grunsbians have noticed. It probably wasn't always like this, though. Back in the forties, this was probably a lucrative holiday destination. People would take their kids to play at the seaside with jam sandwiches and ginger beer like something out of an Enid Blyton novel. Now the only visitors are film crews looking for the saddest looking place in England and emomancers hiding from the law, I guess.



At some point, some optimistic soul tried to liven the seafront up with a pastel-pink coat of paint over everything: railings, buildings, the old, ruined pier. Obviously, they didn't maintain it as everything in town is cracked and flaking from the sea air. Even the town's crown jewel, the Grand Regalia Hotel, which now offers "colour TV in every room", looks like it has a bad case of eczema. The hotel, situated just next to a rickety old Ferris wheel, overlooks the sunken pier like a post-apocalyptic art deco monstrosity. No one ever seems to be staying there, but I can hardly blame them. Any parent who willingly brought their child here today would have social services round faster than a seagull on chips.

One good thing about Grunsbby-on-Sea is that no one bats an eyelid at you. It's the perfect place to hide away and have zero



questions asked. You can walk to the corner shop without anyone sparing you a second glance.

Speaking of which, I pull my coat up over my mouth and head down the hill.

*

The shopkeeper grunts at me as the beeping door heralds my arrival. I'm the only one who seems to come in here, but it's not hard to see why. Plastered to every inch of the glass door are scraps of paper saying "no children", "no loud talking", "no browsing", "no old people" and "no phones".

I flash him an awkward no-lip smile and pick up a basket. Much like the rest of the town, the corner shop is frozen in time. Worn boxes of Jaffa cakes sit limply on the shelves; their sell-by date seemingly older than I am. I pick up a bottle of what I assume is Pepsi – the label is coated in so much dust, it is hard to see. My thumb streaks across it, and a handsome man with way too much gel in his hair looks back at me. Apparently, he's a football player from the 1998 World Cup – not that I have any clue about football despite my dad's repeated attempts to teach me.

I wonder what Mum and Dad are doing right now. They've been visiting my uncle in Madrid for the month – supposedly to "give me room to revise" for my mock A Levels, but I'm pretty sure they just wanted to sunbathe for the whole of November. By now, they're probably the colour of tanned leather and haven't worried about me once. I'm sure Freya's worrying, though. We've been best friends since we were six. She saw my *Ben 10* lunch box from across the playground, marched straight up to me, and demanded we play together. We pretended to turn





into aliens and fight baddies together almost every lunchtime. Since then, she's always been in my life, except for that brief few months in Year Seven when we decided we hated each other. She's in my form but we don't have any subjects together. I tell her everything . . . Well, almost everything.

Recently – well, before I went AWOL – she'd been boring me with every intimate detail of her new boyfriend, Marcus.

Prick.

I've never felt such an instant dislike for someone. He always insinuates that he's a lot smarter than me, just because he's already got uni offers for engineering. He can basically fix anything; it's super annoying. "Stevie, you're doing this wrong . . ." "Stevie, I passed my driving test first time . . ." "Stevie, I'm a prick who has biceps and a car . . ."

Some people assume that I'm jealous, but I'm honestly not. Freya is like my sister – I imagine. I don't have any siblings. But I can safely say our relationship has only ever been platonic. I guess certain things bind you to someone for life. And, apparently, running around the playground pretending to be alien butterflies with freezing breath is one of them. God, I miss her so much . . .

I catch myself, but it might have been too late. I stare at my fingers, hoping that nothing happens, but of course, it does. A faint yellow aura crackles around my hand. I'm manifesting happiness. The sky outside darkens, thunder crashing overhead. Long, spear-like rain plummets to the ground, and a powerful wind rips open the door to the shop.

I grab some milk and pay for it quickly, the shopkeeper too distracted by the sudden downpour to notice my glowing hands. Wrestling the door shut, I turn my face against the storm and trudge back up the hill.



By the time I am at the foot of the rusted metal steps to my flat, the worst of it has passed, but I am entirely saturated. Why couldn't I have packed a jacket with a hood? I didn't have much time to think. I just had to shove everything I could into a bag and leave before anyone noticed. Before anyone could stop me, and by anyone, I mean—

“Freya!”

Stood outside my little shabby door, almost completely dry under an obnoxious frog umbrella, is a copper-headed young woman. Her outfit is a coordinated event of oversized woollen things and bright-pink wellies, and her hair is piled up on her head in a messy bun.

“Alright, Percy? What does a girl have to do to get a cuppa around here?”



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David Fenne is an author, actor, and improv comedian in Pinch Punch, the improv theatre company he runs. Originally from a small village in coastal Dorset, he went to London in 2012 for drama school and trained abroad for half a year at Syracuse University, NY. **OVEREMOTIONAL** is his debut novel and the first title in a new feel-good trilogy.